

SHADE BABALOLA**A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE UNDER-ACHIEVEMENT OF AFRO-CARIBBEAN BOYS WITHIN A 16-19 EDUCATION SETTING****Abstract**

This paper aims to carry out a mini case-study within an inner city sixth form college to critically examine why Afro-Caribbean males under-achieve. It will aim to investigate the reasons for under-achievement and suggest strategies for improving the retention, achievement, attainment and progression of Afro-Caribbean boys in an inner city 16-19 sixth form college.

It seeks to highlight some of the current issues faced by Afro-Caribbean males and the reasons why they often fail to reach their full potential within the sixth form college under investigation. The study aims to examine a combination of factors in terms of parental support and guidance, poor motivation, low expectations, the impact of teaching and learning, socio-economic status, father figures, peer-pressure, marginalisation, discriminatory practices, a comparison of grades achieved compared with other minority groups.

It will also seek to explore the role of education policy on equal opportunities and whether there is a legal right for the victims undermined in education achievement.

The paper also intends to discuss trends with regards to the progression of Afro-Caribbean males in relation to work-placements, apprenticeship and university offers. The paper will also examine the number of Afro-Caribbean males who are accepted at leading universities. It will touch on the exclusion and suspension of Afro-Caribbean males in the 16-19 education sector under investigation.

The papers will seek to highlight strategies that may be implemented to improve the retention, achievement, attainment and the progression of Afro-Caribbean males in relation to mentoring, coaching, shadowing, effective pastoral support, teaching and learning, parental guidance, access, widening participation, a re-emphasis of the awareness of the process of social mobility, equality and diversity, opportunities for enrichment, sport and engagement.

Recommendation will be made on best practice to positively support the victims of underachievement in education in an inner London City sixth Form College.

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to investigate the under achievement of Afro-Caribbean boys within a 16-19 education setting. This paper aims to highlight some of the reasons as to why Afro-Caribbean boys are prone to often under-achieve within the 16-19 educational setting under investigation and to make suggestions with regards to how to turn the achievement and attainment of Afro-Caribbean boys around.

This paper aims to make clear recommendations with regards to how to improve the experience and attainment of Afro-Caribbean boys with the 16-19 education setting.

The college under investigation is located in East London; it has around 2,000 full-time students aged between 16-19; the prior attainment of students is lower than in many sixth form colleges. The ethnic origin of its students is extremely diverse, the predominant groups being of African, Pakistani and Bangladeshi heritage. Over recent years there has been a gradual intake of Eastern European and Turkish students. The largest subject areas are science, mathematics, languages, art, and business.

The Literature Review examines the following

Social Mobility and Child Poverty

The most recent report on social mobility and child poverty (2013) suggests that “Britain is a society of persistent inequality, the life-chances of children in Britain today remains heavily dependent on the circumstances of their birth, children born to poorer families have less favourable outcomes across every sphere of life, and inequality creates barriers to upward mobility”. The report further argues that “these barriers impede progress at all stages: from before birth into the early years, through primary and secondary school and into the adult labour market, they are revealed in measurable gaps in educational attainment, in differential employment opportunities and in health inequalities”.

Segregation and the issue of disadvantage

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2012) suggests that “schools in the UK are amongst the most socially segregated in the developed world”. The report warns “that disadvantaged children are too often concentrated together in schools; this applies both to the children of poorly educated parents and those of immigrant families”.

The latest figures which are from 2010, reveal the UK “has unusually high levels of segregation in terms of the poorest and migrants being clustered in the same schools, the significance of this is that the social background of a schools intake exerts a strong influence on the likely outcomes for pupils”.

Raising Aspirations

Recent research has shown that there is a need for more young people from ethnic minority backgrounds to aim higher and to apply to Russell Group Universities. Research has indicated that those who attend a Russell Group University are more likely to earn significantly more than those who do not. In addition to this they are able to target better job opportunities after graduation.

Teaching and Learning

The quality of teaching can invariably improve the outcome of students from disadvantaged backgrounds, there have been recent initiatives devised to tackle the issue of improving the quality of teaching. One example of this is the Teach First Training Programme. Teach First is an organisation that has recognised the inequality and lack of equal opportunities that often exist amongst students from low socio-economic status backgrounds, the purpose of this organisation is to strive to narrow the education gap between disadvantaged groups and ensure that equality of opportunity is open to all students. One of their initiatives is to ensure minority students including those from disadvantaged backgrounds are able to gain access to

some of the top leading universities in the United Kingdom, with the hope of improving their long term life chances.

According to the importance of Teaching White Paper (2010) in the 1990's, a series of in-depth studies conducted by American academics revealed a remarkably consistent pattern they suggest "that the quality of an individual teacher is the single most important determinant in the school system of a child's educational progress, those pupils taught by the most effective teachers make three times as much progress at those taught by the least effective". Analysis of data from England has shown that "a pupil taking eight GCSE'S taught by "good" teachers will score 3.4 more GCSE points than the same pupil in the same school taught by eight poor teachers". There is evidence to suggest that "pupils from deprived backgrounds may be less likely to experience the good quality teaching they need and deserve".

Facilitating Subjects

Platt (2013) has identified a number of subjects that can give students better opportunities when choosing a leading university. She suggests "that studying at a Russell Group University may greatly improve future career prospects". Furthermore, studies have shown that those who go on to study at Russell Group Universities are likely to earn 10% more than their Modern University counterparts. Platt (2013) suggests "that students choose at least two facilitating subjects when choosing their A levels". The following subjects have been identified as facilitating.

1. Maths
2. Further Maths
3. English Literature
4. Physics
5. Biology
6. Chemistry
7. Geography
8. History
9. Languages (Classical and Modern)

Mentoring

Miller (2002, p. 87) suggests "mentoring schemes that target students from minority ethnic communities therefore frequently aim to raise self-esteem and aspirations through the use of role models from the wider minority community". He further suggests that "one of the key purposes of these schemes is to demonstrate to young people that barriers can be overcome through determination and particular strategies. Role model mentors have had the experience of succeeding in overcoming barriers of racism and discrimination under difficult circumstances. Through mentoring they can pass on to the young valuable insights in terms of coping strategies and practical support, some ethnicity mentorships can also cut through problems of cultural understanding allowing underlying issues to be addressed more rapidly".

The Absent Father

In my opinion the modern day dilemma for many Afro-Caribbean children is growing up in homes with absent fathers. In some instances this has greatly impacted on their ability to achieve in educational settings and work to the best of

their ability, issues pertaining to a lack of discipline at home or instances where mothers find themselves isolated having to work long shifts to fend for their families alone. Furthermore, there is a case to consider where many of these mothers are isolated and are at times unable to meet the emotional and psychological needs of their children, in the worst case scenario this may lead to external influences as some Afro-Caribbean boys are prone to join gangs, others struggle with issues of identity especially in cases where there is limited or no contact with fathers.

Some parents know very little about the British education system, there is an emphasis for young Afro-Caribbean males to do well, but the knowhow is often non-existent, the sharp elbow tactic often demonstrated in white middle class communities is often lacking. There has been a growing trend where young Afro-Caribbean teenage girls have given birth to and mothered young black males “baby mothers” this has not helped the current situation.

Black children don't fail due to racism

Sewell (2010) suggests that “Afro-Caribbean children fail at school because they do not concentrate, not because they are victims of “institutional racism”. He further attacks the view that “black pupils are held back by teachers who see them as miniature gangster rappers he instead blames poor parenting and the youngster’s own lax attitude”. Sewell further argues that “although it was once true that black pupils were held back by racism, times have changed”. He suggests “that the following reasons must be taken into consideration as to why black youngsters are held back, these include poor parenting, peer-group pressure and an inability to be responsible for their own behaviour”. He further states “they are not subject to institutional racism”. He further argues “that he believes black underachievement is due to low expectations of school leaders, who do not want to seem racist and who position black boys as victims”. He further states that “African-Caribbean boys are also the group most likely to be excluded from school”.

Equality of Opportunity

The Equality Act (2010) stated that “schools should be prohibited from harassing and discriminating on the basis of disability, race and sex”. The Act also contains provisions which enable schools to take action to tackle particular disadvantage, different needs or proportionately low participation of a particular group provided certain conditions are met. It further states that “there is a duty to assess and monitor the impact of policies on pupils, staff and parents, in particular the attainment levels of pupils from different racial groups”.

Methodology

A combination of research methods were used for the purpose of this paper such as quantitative and qualitative data. Participants completed two questionnaires; the total amount of participants involved in this inquiry was 25, secondly, statistical data was gathered from the college under investigation. Informal discussions were also held with teachers and leaders. Observations were also conducted. A summary of the data is below.

Findings and Analysis

College Data

Statistical data was gathered from current A 'level Afro-Caribbean male students to find out how well they performed during their first year exams. The reason for the analysis of data was to find out how many students had achieved a high grade in their chosen subjects. For the purpose of this specific research a high grade means whether or not a student had achieved either an A or B grade in their chosen A 'level subject. Data was analysed from a range of facilitating and non-facilitating subjects English Literature, Maths, History, English Language, Economics, Chemistry, Biology, French, Geography and Physics. The figures below show the number of Afro-Caribbean males who are currently enrolled on the subjects and how many achieved a high grade in their first year exam.

English Literature, 3 Afro-Caribbean students enrolled, none achieved an A or B grades in the subject. English Language, 7 Afro-Caribbean males enrolled, 1 achieved a high grade in the subject. Maths, 13 Afro-Caribbean males enrolled, 4 achieved a high grade in the subject. History, 2 Afro-Caribbean males enrolled none achieved an A or B grade in the subject. Economics, 3 Afro-Caribbean males enrolled, none achieved a high grade in the subject. Chemistry, 10 Afro-Caribbean males enrolled, 3 achieved high grades in the subject.

In Biology, 4 Afro-Caribbean boys were enrolled, 2 achieved a high grade in the subject. French, 1 Afro-Caribbean male enrolled, they did not achieve a high grade. Geography, 3 Afro-Caribbean males enrolled none achieved a high grade. Physics, 7 Afro-Caribbean males enrolled, 3 achieved a high grade in the subject.

Overall Success Rate for Afro-Caribbean Males

Data was gathered to show the overall success rate for Afro-Caribbean males from 2010-2013. Figures show there has been a steady increase in success rates from 75% in 2010/11, 79% in 2011/12 and 86% in 2012/13.

Overall Success Rate for White British Males

Similarly figures show the overall success rate for White British Males has grown 2010/2011 at 87%, 2011/12 at 84% and 2012/13 at 93%.

Questionnaire 1

Question 19 from questionnaire 1 asked 10 Afro-Caribbean Science students 'are you currently being mentored within or outside of college?' 9 students responded they are not being mentored whilst 1 stated they were being mentored.

Questionnaire 2

15 Afro-Caribbean male students from the business and computing department completed questionnaire 2. Question 6 asked the respondents if they were currently living with their father's. 8 indicated they lived with their father's whilst 7 said they did not.

8 Afro-Caribbean male Science students also responded to question 6. 5 indicated they lived without their father's and 3 said they lived with their father's.

9 Afro-Caribbean male student's from computing and business responded to the question, what is a Russell Group University? 7 students were unaware of the terminology while 2 from computing had knowledge of a Russell Group University.

8 Afro-Caribbean students from the science department answered the same question, 4 had knowledge of Russell group Universities whilst 4 did not.

Questionnaire 2, question 2, asked 17 Afro-Caribbean male students 'are you working at your full potential?' 5 stated they were working at their full potential whilst 12 said they were not.

Questionnaire 2, question 3 asked 17 Afro-Caribbean males to state their reasons for failing to meet their full potential. 6 said it was due to distractions within and outside of the classroom, 2 indicated financial problems, 1 stated there were problems at home and 3 stated other reasons.

Conclusion

The data shows that White British Males significantly outperform Afro-Caribbean males. Afro-Caribbean males do not achieve high grades for example in English Literature, History, Economics, French and Geography. The overall success rate of Afro-Caribbean males has continued to grow between 2011-2013. However, the total amount of Afro-Caribbean males enrolled at the college is in steady decline; in 2010/2011 there were 202 enrolled, in 2011/2012 there were 142 enrolled, and in 2012/13 there were 124 Afro-Caribbean males enrolled. In some curriculum areas there appears to be low expectations of Afro-Caribbean males, Afro-Caribbean males studying business related subjects have no knowledge of Russell Group Universities this may have long term effects on performance and social mobility. The college currently does not hold data on students who have gained entry to leading universities.

Teaching and learning is a significant factor in raising the achievement and attainment of many Afro-Caribbean boys and this has been evidenced by the data, some curriculum areas outperform others in this respect subject areas such as Maths and science have significant rates of achievement in terms of higher grades for Afro-Caribbean boys in comparison to other areas. The data shows that a significant number of Afro-Caribbean boys do not live with their fathers; however, few receive the college bursary. Some students highlighted financial problems as a reason they were not working at their full potential. Furthermore, the majority of Science students indicated they were not currently being mentored even those who are working towards competitive courses.

There are varying perspectives of under-achievement, although current data indicates significant improvement there remains a lot to be done to improve performance in real terms amongst Afro-Caribbean boys.

Recommendations

- A thorough enrolment process where students are guided carefully to choose at least two facilitating subjects at advanced level where possible.
- A mentoring scheme geared towards facilitating the achievement of Afro-Caribbean boys.
- A commitment from the Senior Leadership Team to improve the outcomes of Afro-Caribbean boys in terms of high grades achieved.
- A commitment from Afro-Caribbean boys to take responsibility for their own learning.

- A robust tutorial system to ensure that Afro-Caribbean boys are working at their full potential.
- Data that shows by ethnicity the number of Afro-Caribbean boys that go on to leading universities.
- Strategy to help Afro-Caribbean boys achieve higher grades.

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